

Interview with Rick Vucich

Interviewer: Jess Lamar Reece Holler

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Backstretch at Delaware County Fairgrounds

Jess: All right. So I'm Jess Lamar Reece Holler with the Little Brown Jug oral history project. Can you tell me your full name and just spell it for record?

Rick: Rick Vucich. V, as in Victor U-C-I-C-H.

Jess: Awesome. And Rick, what brings you out here to the Jug. You told me you're from Indiana and you guys started coming maybe five years ago?

Rick: Yeah. I'm from Indiana. A lot of harness racing shut down around the Chicago area. We're from up near there. So there's only one track left up there. It's Hawthorne so we started coming out here about 5 or 6 years ago really just to check it out and kinda just fell in love with it. It's a neat thing with the small town atmosphere.

Jess: What do you think is like unique about the culture at the Jug?

Rick: The proximity. You can just go right up to the drivers, trainers. Walk around here. You can't really see that at other tracks. It's kinda neat. Walk up to them. I get autographs. It's kinda cool for me.

Jess: And you follow a lot of racers across...

Rick: Yeah. Definitely, definitely. Went down to the Breeder's Crown at Hoosier Park last year and I checked them out there. Yeah, I like to try to get around. See a lot of the major events.

Jess: Do you guys camp when you come up or do you stay in town at a hotel?

Rick: No, no, no. We stay in a hotel. I'm not...A bit rough at that

Jess: That's interesting. Part of what we're interested in is, like, what are the... Some people stay in hotels, some people camp. You said, not for you.

Rick: No, no, no. That would be a little too much roughin' it there.

Jess: Now how late in the evening do you guys stay? We're curious about, like, is there a nightlife to the races or do the Jug people leave when the races are done?

Rick: Well, unfortunately, I made her stay with me last night. I was trying to get Ron Pierce's autograph. They inducted him in the Wall of Fame.

Jess: We saw that at the cabin. That's a private party. Ok

Rick: He had, so started at 6 and it was after 7 and he hadn't showed up yet, as I, abandoned ship around 7:30. We'd generally probably stay a lot longer than she'd care to stay in the evening. Yeah, we hung out pretty late last night.

Jess: We're trying to figure out: Do people come out specifically for the Jugette, some of the big races or do you see mostly people consistent across the whole event?

Rick: Yeah. We come, we came up Monday, so we were here a little bit Monday, but at least 3 or 4 full days here. You know, but really came out for the two big races. I mean the Jug is crazy with all the people. It's kinda nice today because you don't have the crowds to deal with that you're gonna have tomorrow. So it's a little more relaxed atmosphere.

Jess: What drew you to this kind of harness racing in particular? Did you grow up around horses or the industry?

Rick: Yeah. I had two uncles that raced and trained horses years ago in Indiana. I had my grandpa take me out to the farms then and so kinda got hooked into it back when they had black and white pictures only in the winner's circle and stuff. And just kinda I think that's like you said, not a whole lot of young people are into this. I think it's people who grew up around it or had some kinda connection to it. It doesn't seem to transcend to the younger generation.

Jess: That's what the historical society is trying to do with this project. Kinda communicate. Kids get school off tomorrow to come down. And they're worried: What if they don't understand why they're getting school off for? It's like a big deal.

Rick: They shut school down. I understood they shut school down all week here.

Jess: I don't know if it's all week. It might be all week.

Rick: Grade school...

Jess: In your area, Chicago, racing's been shut down.

Rick: The only harness track left up in Chicago is Hawthorne Park. They're really a short season now. I can see that probably losing for good.

Jess: What makes you think race tracks have been shutting down? The races themselves? Is it the lack of attendance? Differences in what people want to do with their horses?

Rick: I don't know. I just think that it's it's really not that... There are so many casinos, race-inos like Ohio does and I think that drags some people into the casino. But I think people just don't really get excited about gambling on horses. You get the derby, Kentucky Derby, the big thoroughbred stuff, probably has more of a draw than the harness. I don't really know what it is but it's probably no exciting enough for a lot of people to watch harness racing.

Jess: Then again you've got horses and slot machines only do so many things. They're kinda predictable, this... Is there anything else we should know about what draws people to here, the culture?

Rick: I can't tell you too much.

Jess: Thanks for chatting with us. It's been wonderful. It is Thurs... no, Wednesday, September 19th, 2018. I think we're heading into the 14th race. Thanks very much.

Rick: No problem.